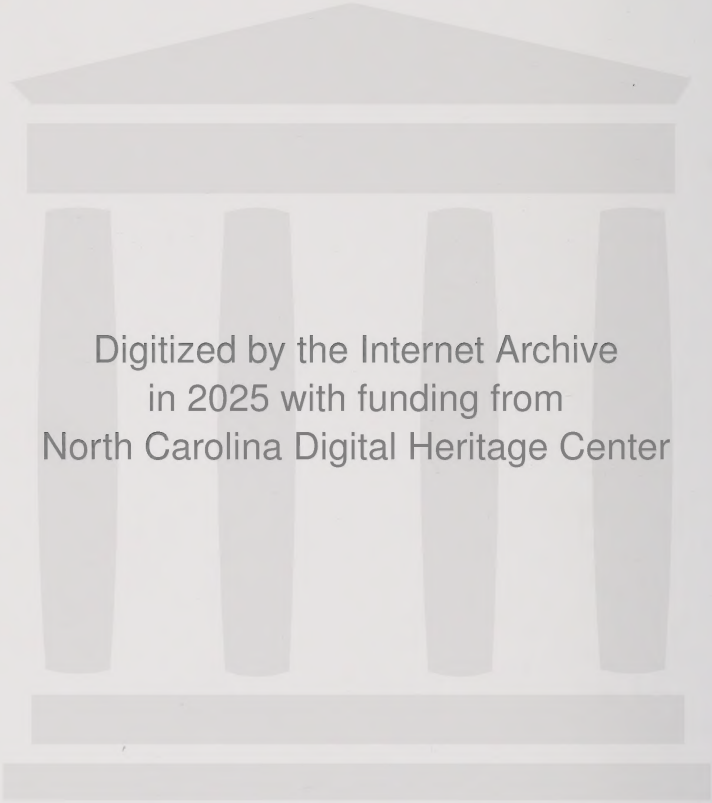
THE RHAPSODIST

Literature and Arts Journal

2015

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College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The Rhapsodist

Spring 2015

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, NC

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Editor's Note:

"The struggle of literature is in fact a struggle to escape from the confines of language; it stretches out from the utmost limits of what can be said; what stirs literature is the call and attraction of what is not in the dictionary."
-Italo Calvino

Dear Reader,

As A-B Tech's primary venue for literature and fine art, *The Rhapsodist* showcases the best examples of creative expression from our college's diverse population. We are pleased to announce that our editorial staff has doubled this year, and in kind, we hope also to increase our presence in the community. With your continued support, *The Rhapsodist* is excited to help you "escape from the confines of language."

"Reading is going toward something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be."
-Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*

Calvino, Italo, and William Weaver. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. Print.

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rhapsodist, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'rapsədəst/ , U.S. /'ræpsədəst/
Etymology: < rhapsody n. + -ist suffix. Compare French rhapsodiste ...

1. A collector of miscellaneous literary pieces. Now hist. and rare.

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A-B Tech's Student Services Department

"rhapsodist." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3rd ed. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2011. Web. 8 March 2012.

The Sexy Sentences of 2015

Chiedono a gran voce bagnato stare in piedi nuovo, il giardiniere.
Clamoring wet stands new, the gardener.
- Oskar Gambony-Steding

Microwaving his dinners had become a "3 to 4 minute" unwanted wait in his busied life when he could not keep his depression at bay, and the "1 minute to let stand" was nearly murderous.
- Brian Longacre

In the small, humid space between the inside satin top of my fur felt bowler and the wispy surface of my balding scalp, there is a sacred space, a womb, where ideas swirl and swell, pipping to be known.
- Brian Longacre

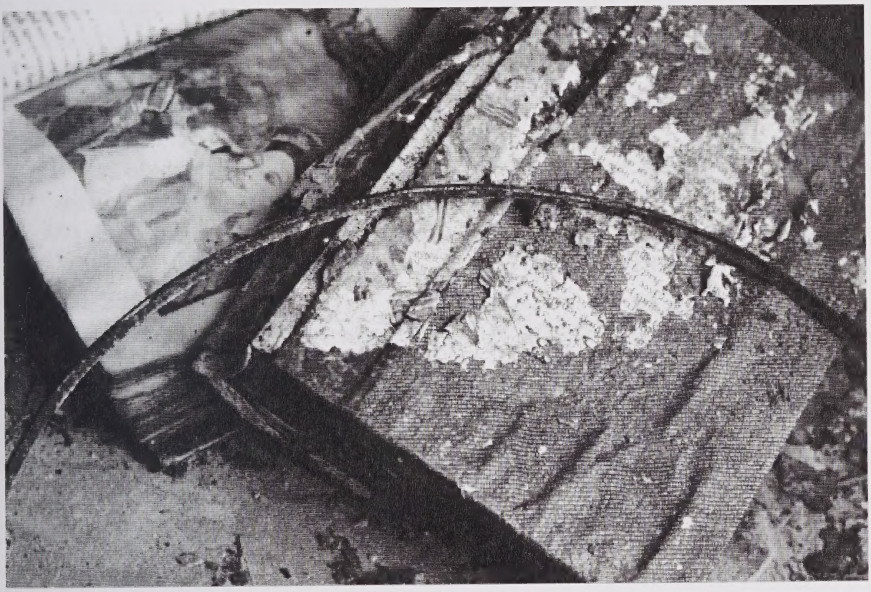
The shattered mirror dragged behind, taunting her for the rest of her miserable days.
- Hope Burnett

The loose blue strands of night had split, so that the sun rose up in sheets of white against the hospital, like reams of paper.
- Grey Wolfe LaJoie

Eventually the sun rose, and in the melancholy midday heat one August, Pozzo and Aysel found they had so many leftover mason jars full of lightning bugs that their closet couldn't hold them anymore and, brittle and brown as crumbs of toast, they lost their flicker and wilted.
- Grey Wolfe Lajoie

The tv still glowed against her mother's skin, and its gray light made her seem as pale as aspirin.
- Grey Wofle LaJoie

Since the day you and I met nearly a decade ago, he has taken up the habit of visiting my dreams and whispering in my ear that single soft syllable reserved for him and me: Mom.
- Porscha Orndorf



Forgotten Words

by marklar klepac

An Official Record Keeper - Or, New York Times Friday, January 23 2015

by markia brooks

Her eyes are still
gazing at the too small black print
on grey pulp thin background.
Words blur phasing in and out, like tube television static.
Again she backs the butt of her wrist to the nose rim of her glasses.

What a useless dollar store prescription.
How many little characters has she lost
in the light waves bouncing from
page to eye, eye to page?
How much can she know about
the Suspicious Death in Argentina?

Before her smoke break is over,
before Will surrenders the Arts section,
before he stills his coffee stealing all the
stolen words
with his long heavy glare?

God Has Cajun Seasoning on His Fingertips:

[6.62606957 × 10-34 m2 kg / s or "Ich glaube ich spinne"- Max Planck]

by ethan risinger

The other day,
In the Bojangles Drive-Thru,
Impatience loitered in inhales
Like dust at oxygen parties, and my friend
(Far distanced from high invisible sea walls of quantum
And Planck shivering outside Lutheran churches staring at the tips
Of steeples holding his theories and constants in palm crevasses for warmth
Muttering in German how his things are so small that they are large)
Inhaled a quantum of God from a whiff of the Drive-Thru window.

A subatomic twinge of insanity,
A gifted mandate of heaven, passed with panko breading,
The smallest necessary bit, forged in a kitchen of fats and molasses
A constant of life in the nanoscale, the first particle of breath in a kiss
Latent and unrushed with a hint of Cajun seasoning, drifting like a spider
Rocking on his webbing in the wind like a grandfather on a porch.

He started to hyperventilate,
Sounds like a belligerent printer
Exited from his firmament, carried him
By the ends of exhales to open the door
Of the Volkswagen and wobble from the seat like a paraplegic.
Body hoped for a walker and stumbled but eyes tore apart the microbial
tissues
Of the dark as moonlight like chicken skin aluminized in a celestial
Fryer and fell like the crispy bookends of chicken tenders on top of his crown.

As his pores dilated and
Inner blackheads extended themselves
Like grappling hooks towards a light
Atop the roof of Bojangles which too shivered
In the introduction of September and miniscule blue Forget-me-not's,
I manually rolled down the window, forced my head into Holocene cold
And wailed at him to remove his skins from the freeze of the iron step(pe)
ladder
That carried him in divine lunacy to the top of Bojangles already murmuring
in confused
Furies "DGOGD! DGOGD! WHERE IS MY DGOGD TO SAVE ME! WHERE
IS MY PLANCK"

But is it a God or a Dog?
Should I have searched for Yahweh or Scout?
I dismissed it and stared into black matted hair
Frenzied on the back of his skull, scared witless
As arms like tubes that bubbled with passionate fires reached heavenward
Mumbling all the same towards salty chicken halyards and gooed macaroni deities
While the cars behind us in the Drive-Thru honked and rustled their wheezing engines to grind
With grittier oils and colder sands as the 32 degree mark treaded lower and lower towards earth.

And he,
My friend,
Seeking God on top a Bojangles,
Followed the path of the temperature
And fell like an imbibed spider to the concrete by the dumpster,
Missing the grime barely by measurements of breaths or germs or spiders
Or blood splatter exiting the mouth as soon as he lands and the elderly indoors
Rush out with plump Sunday chickens for boys and breadcrumbs of worry on their lips,
Cheeks not growing red from care but from stains of powdered allspice and cayenne pepper.

Sunday clothes and homeless cloth
Mutter and bumble around the heaving body
Of my friend who is alive and insane and losing control
Of his mind while a single quantum floats and pokes the skin
Below his bottom lip as a gristle man creaks from inside and coughs
Into my shoulder blade and makes a haggard joke in a haggard language
Mentioning he should get a 401K for this and that the seasoning wasn't spicy enough
And that Planck and Luther and Math would giggle if they saw him hocking loogies
Over the body of a boy bothered by this microscopic speck of salt driven into him by a fun
Time at Bojangles on his off day as hints of Cajun seasoning trickle onto my friend's forehead.

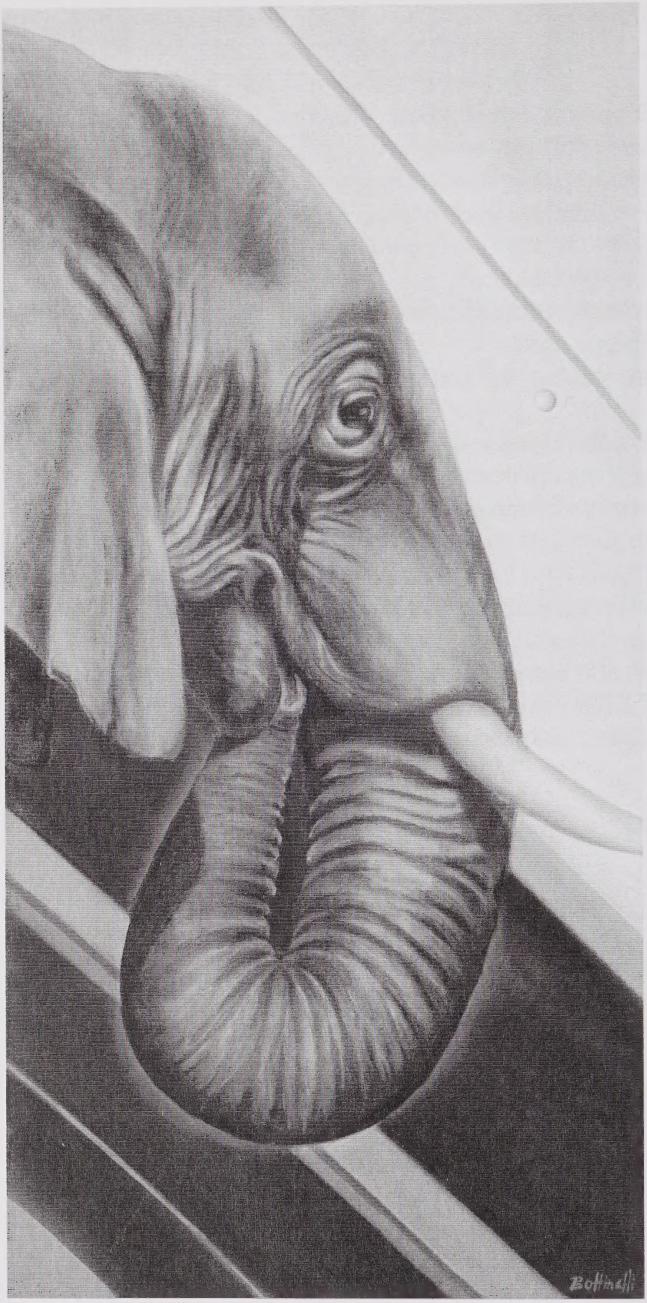
Ashes of Love
by mauro a. nieto

Behind the cornea, pictures of
skin mixing with sweat.
Her softest thorn of joy and pain,
pushed into my spine with incandescent bliss.

Her saliva germinates weightless body,
my fingers, her hair, a fresh breeze in a Amazonian jungle.
As I feel the wind under my nails,
my veins become roots, craving the scent of her soil.

Passing the threshold of the invisible door,
my eyes hold the lines of her chiaroscuro shoulders.
Now she is only a screen of vibrating colors, a red sun
takes one last breath.

Beside her, my pupils are black holes,
melting time, slicing my thoughts into thin dragonfly wings,
turning them into dust and flames. I now hold a bird that's turned into
a moth, as it takes off it fills my hands with black smoke.
Green turns to black, love becomes latex.



The Engineer
by sandra bottinelli

Naming My Noun
by abigail hickman

Inhale, exhale, inhale, wheeze. Stop, bend over at the waist gasping for breath. Consider dropping to the ground panting and clutching my chest for dramatic effect. All this just from walking from my sofa to the refrigerator. This has been my experience with vigorous action. I am sedentary by nature and lazy either by some sort of genetic mishap or just a general lack of ambition not to be, but either-which-way, I like to sit. I'm happy to engage in an activity if I can do it from a seated position. This is less limiting than one might initially imagine: reading, eating, watching things on screens, playing board games, puzzles, chopping vegetables for soup, or even better, stirring butter and chocolate together for icing - all these activities are within my range of motion. I can even garden sitting down.

I'll accept movement if I am assured there will be seating at the end of it. Picnics, for example, require a certain amount of walking to get to the right spot, but like a donkey with a carrot, I can be persuaded to engage if there is sitting and my super favorite, sitting with food at the end of the walk. My husband has used this technique successfully to lure me on multiple back woods excursions and even bike rides. "Abigail, you want to go sit by a powerful waterfall?" He'll ask with his pretty mouth and distracting jawline. And several hours later with dead bugs sticking to my sweating forehead, we'll reach the waterfall. Sitting is out of the question because all I can manage is a tumbling kind of collapse onto a rock where there may or may not be a waterfall cascading as I am too busy attempting to dial 911 for an airlift out.

But all of this changed recently after I read a book written by a man in a medical condition known as "locked-in". He suffered a stroke and woke from his comma to discover the only muscle that he could control was the one beneath his left eye, meaning he could wink. That was the only movement afforded to him. A little twitch under his eye. After assessing his grim and depressing situation, he determined to write a book, the very one I read, by blinking and winking each letter from a special letter board to a transcriber. The book was horribly beautiful in that painful way inspiration can come but I was especially struck by a scene where he is wheeled to the beach near his permanent room in a hospital. His girlfriend pushes the wheelchair into which he is strapped while his two children romp about him on the sand. He watches all of this out of his one working eye and remembers the privilege of scratching his own nose or running with his son who stops at frequent intervals to turn a somersault. I finished the book and decided to start running.

It's a strange tribute, really, to this elegant man who was forced to forsake his own gentility by waiting for a nurse to wipe the drool that had dripped to his chin. Sometimes this wait took hours. This was a man of refinement, cashmere sweaters and carefully prepared meals. I recall his final meal, before he became a captive of his body, involved escargot with some sort of complimenting wine. But when I finished the book, I felt I had to *something*. I owed

it, if not to him (he died shortly after the release of book) then for me. I still had control of my muscles; I could command them to swat at a fly or caress my love and the book allowed me to see the privilege in such actions. So I decided to run.

It wasn't a pretty thing. My body balked and attempted at every possible juncture to stop what it saw as a revolt against everything we held dear. It came up with reasons why I shouldn't go to the gym—it was a long and compelling list—or run outside around my block. The gym was full of grunting panting slippery people, my knees were sore, my head hurt, it was so cold out etc. It tried to convince me to sit down with our old friend *Netflix* and a nice buttery bowl of popcorn but it underestimated my resolve. It wasn't so much that I was running for that man as much as because of him.

Despite the fact that I am statically closer to my grave than my birth, I still have big plans for myself. None of them involve running in a formal way. I hold no delusions that my fifteen minute mile will earn me the title of "athlete". Running has become my metaphor. I spent so many years of my life classified with nouns that I never felt suited me. I've always been a big one for verbs. I like the action behind them. Build, believe, laugh, there is such promise in this kind of intellectual movement. Conversely, I've had very little use for nouns. This aversion likely started in my middle school science class where we were taught the genus and kingdoms of plant species. All those classifications made me dizzy. I couldn't keep the larger categories untangled from the smaller ones. Is a kingdom a part of species or the other way around?

Later, when my own personal kingdom added species of its own, I struggled with the label mother and, later still, when kingdom took on a religious tone, I became addled by the classification of missionary. As I stumbled out of my youth the nouns came at me with alarming accuracy, Christian, uneducated, waitress, and even at one point, homeless. Despite this disappointing parade of nouns announcing my weaknesses and vulnerabilities, verbs marched in to offer hope. Educate ushered in graduate which sprouted itself into teach and publish.

And now I find myself full circle, I'm in love with the verb run and in being so, embrace a new noun, runner. I will run towards my life, towards my love, towards myself while I still am able. My new nouns capture my life in non-wheezing breathless ways: teacher, wife, writer, woman and even queen of my happy kingdom.

Cold Sheets
by magnolia wilson

All I ever needed was to share a cigarette with you,
Watch words billow forth from your smooth taut lips.

These truths permeate evening's air, resonate
Like tolling bells in a mosque that calls prayer.

And with you, there is still so much to pray for.
To know the scent of your skin, whether it is citrus bright or mahogany deep.
To watch your breasts sway any sinner's doubt that life is not beautiful.

I've come to press you against cold sheets
And place delicate things on your chest.
A feather, a used postage stamp, a newborn girl.

To savor you the way a girl gums a ripe fig,
Split our antiquity into pieces with my tongue,
Scrape you clean with my teeth.

And while I imagine us pushing chairs against the wall,
Slow dancing to Patsy Cline in the living room,
I sit, smoking in silence, to study your candle dim frame,
Envying the mosquito who drinks your blood.

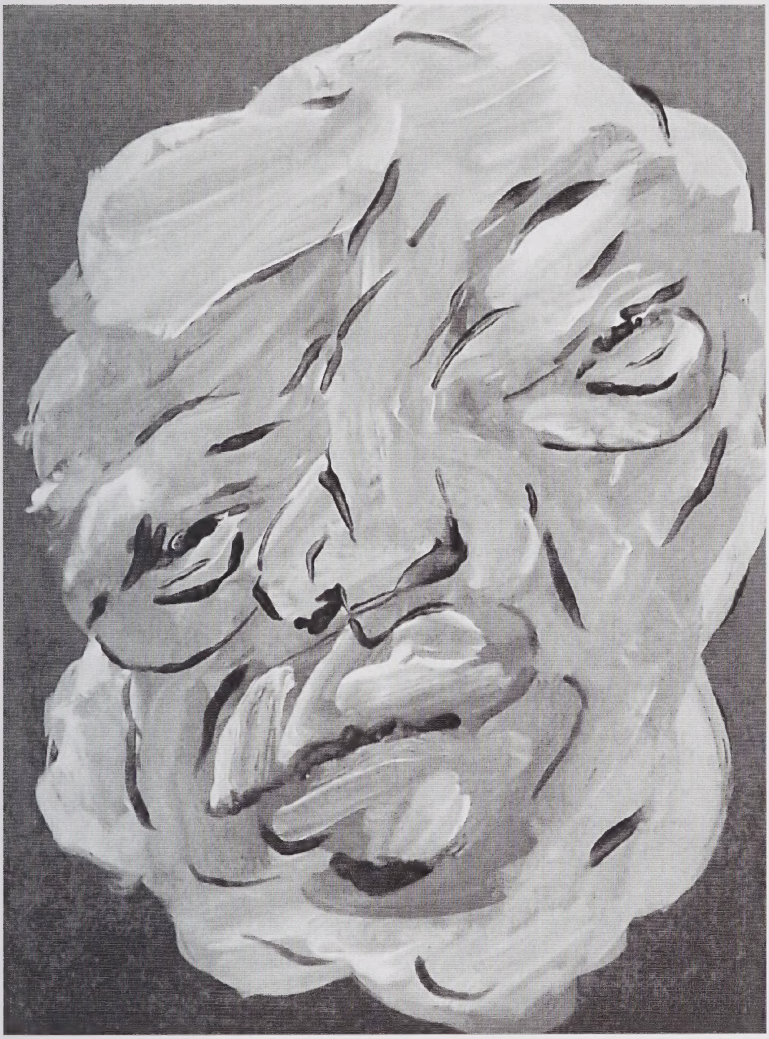
Lessness
by oskar gambony-steding

Is it a continuous tightening
from the outside in,
Trembling outs t r e t c h e d
compression
the imploding *pop*
like a rubber band

Or a careless tearing
loose in passing,
fabric caught on
barbwire claws
Exposed threads
torn apart but
still somehow
connected

If you called me,
Wilting, all of your
blemishes fraying
steadily away
or
Just before you were
squished between
rolling finger tips
The subtle back
and forth
of unwound flesh,
gelatinous amidst
some intention gone sour,
Frozen and thawed
by steel on slick ice
and flaming condominiums

When they snapped
and you found yourself
caked into the ridges
of these nervous fingers;
pressed into their own
unintentional identity
for just a moment before
they wipe you away,
crusting on a pant leg



Ol'
by micala smith

Dialogue with Spring
by lin h. orndorf

Her call of concern goes unanswered that evening.
Saying her letter has received no reply, she leaves a message for morning.
Is everything alright? Are you both well?
Give us a call, she says with a slight lilting whine.

The slivered moon sinks in the west,
Exiting the edge of a void where starlight pin pricks the tightly stretched night.
Tiny spring peepers accompany the falling darkness.
Cycling around, winter suddenly turns over into spring.

I call her back to say we are both fine but busy like mad March hares
With paperwork and business trips and life's general needs.
She interrupts twice with asides and what did you say
And asks again why we haven't called.

Pale pink blossoms flow along bowed branches dipping to the ground.
Once buried alive now racing each other to reach the sun,
Tender green shoots and leaves rise up from red clay soil.
The perennial resurrection signals the last season's end.

She tells me the new dog Charlie is fitting in nicely with everyone else.
She tells me about the new nephew and hopes he'll be a blessing.
Gem the horse is still at boarding school and excelling.
She hopes to ride with him soon into the fair hills where trout lilies bloom.

I watch stripe-throated sparrows gather up long grass blades,
Picking and choosing one at a time, then flying into a hillside cedar tree.
Between aromatic evergreen branches,
They'll weave a basket-shaped nest for their brown speckled eggs.

I'm reminded that mine is an inconvenient life happening at inopportune times
Since my Saturday birth when dad was off work.
She says they want to visit in May but sighs about the distance to drive.
I try to reply but am interrupted by her insistence she needs to be home for church.

I gaze into the scene in the yard outside
Where azaleas are blooming and purple iris unfurl their petals on tall slender stalks.
Sunlight is flickering in shifting shadow patterns cast by shiny new leaves.
Her voice fades away like a bee buzzing off to a distant apple blossom.

Music Teacher: Newtown
by mark damon puckett

Do you deeply go away
when you stare at the white?
Is it easier to be blind now
than to shake all the hands?
Frantic crowd behind
us teeming black ants.

Your hand I press, our warm
palms touch for seconds . . .
your fingers played once
when we sang in front of you
not this, a different crowd,
the clean white box

a still heart sealed
in the center like ice.
It is raining outside
you wipe mist from
my dark jacket as
the others keep coming

to you and you tell me
it has been so long
since we played.

Snow on the Strip Mall Tomorrow
anonymous

This winter, I'm cranking out community service at the thrift store.
Mostly I stand outside the doors and wait
because the dust in there makes me nauseous, and 'cause I'm sick
of those fuckboys, what talk out the sides of their mouths.
So I smoke or else sit in my truck and watch my knuckles
on the wheel.

But it's
a easy job, and sometimes you find things in the boxes.
Like today, a pack of cigs, but inside there was just little plastic spiders.
And last night, I found a pet. Stuffed, no shit,
some kind of rind around his eye, and the legs bent
all to hell and I'm holding him away from me and I start
for some reason, to think about Max,
who used to lay up in my arms, at night.

It's real easy work, but something
inside me is stubborn.
Boys in there huddle like a cyst,
talk about the weather, while I sit out back,
my mind knitted into tissues of someone
real old, still living like a slob
at home. Some other face, my tongue sunk into it,
sprained into a character not my own.
Someone else's
anaemic heart trembles
inside of my
swollen, falling
chest.

Maurice
by chris smith

My wife did not join me for breakfast so I drank two cups of coffee and ate two rounds of toast. I also used both sets of utensils. I went to the bathroom to take my pills and found a note from my wife:

> I'M LEAVING. I AM NOT COMING BACK. I AM NOT SORRY, BUT I AM SORRY FOR YOU. I HEARD THAT GETTING AN ANIMAL CAN HELP WITH THE LONELINESS. DON'T FORGET TO TAKE YOUR PILLS.
>
> JEAN.

It had only been the night before that I found a maggot in my apple and accused Jean of being a witch. She was angry and had told me to take my pills. I had suggested she let me burn her in the back garden, or attempt to drown her in the bath. She was black furious. I looked at the note and then at my pills; I threw them both in the bin. An animal? I thought.

I wrote a letter to my son. I told him I was going to get a pet, maybe he would like to come see it. I didn't mention Jean.

"I want something to help with the loneliness," I told the pet store worker. He offered me a dog. "I'm not very good with daily routine," I said. He sold me a baby black pig.

"Very affectionate and intelligent," he said.

At the far end of my garden I built a circular compound with wooden stakes and a wire mesh fence. The pig appeared to like his new home, but he did not help with my loneliness.

Every day I went to see the pig at the bottom of my garden. The pig grew. I decided to make a special effort and invited him into my house. He was content and helped with my loneliness. We lived happily together for two days. On the third day I found the pig in the bathroom. The rubbish bin had been upturned and the pig had swallowed the pills that my wife had cursed.

I banished the pig to his wire mesh circle and monitored him over the next few weeks. It was as I suspected. The pig sprouted a set of sharp, dirty-white tusks. His dark fuzzy hair turned into coarse grey and black bristles and he became too big to hold in my arms.

So she was a witch! I thought.

The first time he growled at me I hid in the cupboard under the stairs. I was lonely under the stairs. I thought about what I had created in the back garden. I did not think the pig could help with my loneliness until I had purged my wife's black magic from its blood.

I wrote my daughter a letter. I told her I was Cesar Millan, only for pigs. I know she respects what Cesar does for dogs. I didn't mention Jean.

I left the cupboard to face my pig. On our first encounter it struck me that the pig had turned into a hell-boar. I stood at a safe distance and addressed him directly so that he would know I meant business.

"Hell-boar," I said. "I am here to purge my wife's black magic from your blood, then you can help with my loneliness."

The hell-boar stared at me and yawned. His jaw stretched wider than I would have imagined; about thigh wide. It was a cunning move.

Show no fear, I thought.

I stared back. Yawning was not an option; we both knew my teeth were not as sharp, nor my jaw as wide. I wiggled my fingers instead, knowing it would rile him. Red ants swarmed my left foot. I abandoned my slipper and hopped away.

The hell-boar has allies, I thought.

I spent two days itching my ant bites under the kitchen table and I formulated a plan. I also adapted to the strengths of my enemy and found some Wellington boots in the utility room.

The hell-boar was unaware of my plan; I had made sure of this by planning not to have a plan so he could not become aware of it by some dark means. I hoped my confidence would unsettle him. I strode around his pen. I stopped and scooped up a handful of dirt. I rubbed it between my finger and thumb. I sniffed it, brushed my hands clean, and continued my circle. The hell-boar followed me in a small circle of his own. He stopped when I stopped and shuffled when I strode.

This hell-boar is good, I thought.

I could tell that he was thinking the same about me; it was because I sniffed the dirt. It was time to assert my authority.

"Hell-boar," I said. "It is time to assert my authority."

I stamped my feet and stared at the hell-boar. The hell-boar stared back. This standoff lasted for over a minute. The hell-boar grunted. It was a guttural German noise from deep within his chest and amplified through layers of broken glass and gravel in his throat. A demon noise.

I twitched, a little quirk in my right eye that I've never been able to control. Perseverance seemed futile. I still hadn't blinked but I could feel the tears pushing and shoving against each other to flood my eyes. I couldn't let him see me cry and so as he blurred in front of me, I walked away.

My wife is strong in the dark arts, I thought.

Since they lived together, I wrote a joint note to my son and daughter. I told them owning a pig was making me a better father.

I decided to call the hell-boar Maurice to make him sound less scary. Since he had not physically harmed me on our second encounter, I braved a quick return. It was a rash decision and I regret it. I approached the pen with a large stick. Maurice paused in his snuffling for food; he seemed wary of the stick. Sensing my upper hand I stepped towards the pen.

Maurice shuffled backwards.

I found myself standing next to the wire mesh fence. I took long deep breaths and hoped my his acute hearing could not detect my heart rate.

For glory, I thought.

I prodded the stick over the fence and into the pen. Maurice exploded in a fury of grunts. He leapt forward without moving a muscle. It was more of a transition.

I saw through his demon-eyes, into his soul. Maurice was terrified of the stick. He loathed it. But he'd be damned if something as irrelevant as terror was going to stop him. This epiphany hit me like a stone hurled by a giant. I dropped the stick and ran.

From behind a bush I watched Maurice (hell-boar) chewing on the stick. It was a branch that I'd snapped from the pear tree and I wished I'd had the foresight to choose a poisonous wood.

Damn that Maurice (hell-boar), I thought.

I did not return to the house. I spent a long time sitting underneath the pear tree, out of sight of Maurice's (hell-boar) pen. I snapped a second thinner branch from the tree and chewed on the bark. I thought about Maurice (hell-boar). I knew I would have to take this battle to his demonic level.

I composed a poem in my head to recite to my family when they visited Maurice and I.

Our fourth encounter was as ferocious as it was short. To beat the boar, you have to become the boar, I thought.

I returned to the bush where I had last hid and removed all of my clothes. I rolled around in the dirt. I rubbed mud into my face and over my body. I took my white shirt and tore a thin cotton strip from the sleeve. I tied this around my head so that the forces of good and evil could be distinguished.

I ran from the bush and vaulted the fence into Maurice's (hell-boar) domain. The shock tactic worked. I landed on Maurice (hell-boar) and wrapped my arms around his stubby neck. My momentum dragged us both to the ground. Maurice squealed like a common pig. I laughed, but Maurice squirmed free and slammed two cloven hooves into my midriff. I gasped and curled fetal in the mud. My hand clawed out to grab his hind-leg but he pulled away. Maurice (hell-boar) took two powerful strides and leapt. He sailed out of the pen with an elegance I did not expect. In mid-air he sprouted wings and flew to Persia.

I used my finger to write a note in the mud to my wife.

Athena of the Dust
by summer nordmeyer

Buried Affections
by marklar klepac

We have wrestled on this rocky mound
for what seems like years,
her stale, steady breaths tear the leaves from my branches,
and ease me forward into a trance.
Her grip like roots latching
onto a cheap casket as I'm handed
down into her soiled depths,
forced as it seems,
into this sweet place of fertility.

Caught in this moment, a suspended bead of sweat,
perspiration bleeds out of me like formaldehyde,
I descend lower and lower into longing,
into her depths, the depths of She
-ol. Her teeth, her tenacious blades of love
ripped through my clothing, the abrasion
too much for the tiny fibers of my ironed carcass to endure.
The frail sheet bent and moaned beneath the weight of our mortal dance.

Her fingers slid into the creases of my flesh,
seeking a structure to abide in,
sending a deep stiffness into my delicate bones.
The frost of her touch, an anchor pulling
me under jagged, frigid waves.
Her quiet whispers like the
last shortened breaths of
a drowning man's lungs,
escaping through lips
sewn shut.

Her skin shifted and sank like a shipwreck
and buried my body, that was laid out,
exposed like a smooth crack
in a decaying tree revealing its rings for the
pleasure of the observer.
Her final stand, her one last move
lingering among the ants,
the worms, the snails,
waiting for her call
to beckon us into oneness
forever.

Poetics
by grey wolfe lajoie

The Poet will arrive at your doorstep,
Black bars over his eyes,
Try to sell you his song,
Clever and tuneless.
Cause for alarm.

The poet can imagine you as a child,
Recall dreams for you,
Lick his way through scenes,
Then pop atop the meaning,
Like a robin on its wire.

Just beware.
He laughs in riddles, the poet.
Such skin of olive paste will slip,
And dainty fists will slide in step
Across your Georgia skin.
Fingers of thieves, soft and bruised,
He stole my mother too.
That vicious midget, a jockey without guilt.
This is important listen;
Don't let the poet lie to you.

He might, if you're not careful, glide reckless,
Fall careless, into that fragile lump
Inside your chest.
Then twist and split the alibi.
Bleed dry the pigments, mud to ink to mud.

He studies you through moonlight's husk,
Asks "What is yesterday that it comes today?"
He tells how many sounds you make
Could have been his favorite.
Think you see the birds in the trees again?
You're only acid washed in an image then.
Sopping wet, flip-flops lost,
Drowned so thick in wit.
Apologetic and heavy
With kisses and pops and screams.

The poet
Is a sleazy angel,
A denim spirit sprinting.
His wads of wing fall off in hunks,
Cigarette smoke shuffled.
He speaks such hushes,
Just specks. Like oil, like sin.

Dear poet, how can I help,
My hero of loneliness?
Nothing. I suspect.
You see? His eyes, run long, droop,
like drips of honey, like glue.
His eyes run along, and come back burnt
Just like glass, the long thin glint.
Get used to the shards at your feet.
We are made of the flu.
Black and blue disappear from your face.
What news do I have for you?

I Am Questionable and Warm to the Touch

by makenzie peterson

Sometimes I wish I was still out there
in the valley, dropped down in the sand
with the buried beer cans and broken glass
on the river bend. I miss the boys bouncing
on their heels, clapping dust into the air.

I miss watching those bones lay down and swing around
and twist when they walk. I want to lay in the smell
of them, in the sweat & tobacco of them.
I can't keep my eyes off the unsettling skin
of young men, the space peeking from the stretched
hemline, pulled over hip bones and bones I don't know the names of.

I want to watch them eat, I want their fingers
in my mouth and at my throat.
I miss the river bend because it is where the wild
animals play out their hot days
and today it is hot.

I miss them like I miss milk and rug burn.
When the boys are in my head they are loud
and painful and perfect. They slip through my fingers
like the sand under your feet. They trick me sweet
without even looking into my eyes.

Road Kill Sister
by micala smith

An angry cake thrown
at your pearl trimmed chest
Flinched and broke on your new car

Driving upset on wooded turns
Tire tracks from your
Vandalized convertible
carved frosting in the road kill
Sweet little pinks and blues
on a rabbit's intestines

Too late in the year to turn back
but you know licking animal fuzz
tastes like a birthday cake
you had when your sister felt sick
and the mental flow
was all over the carpet
Your mother's frantic petting
Of that sick, damp head
Left your father to bake
just back from a hunt
bloody hands mingled with
store bought batter
a cake topped in gristle
made your birthday
come with shivers

You didn't go back to see
If the taste of her sickness
was left with the crows

Roses and Rocks
by natalya mokritskaya

The "Special" Disability
by terrence brown

The one thing I learned about life is to always expect the unexpected. Ever since that I can remember, my life was different than most people I knew. When people see my face, they really don't see anything wrong with me. What most people don't know about me is that I have a "special" disability. Being "special" means that I am so different from most people. This disability is so debilitating that I'm forced to not only deal with it, but to live with it for the rest of my life.

This "special" disability that I suffer from is autism spectrum disorder or ASD. In simpler terms, I have autism. It's a type of disorder in the brain, which my speech is impaired and eye contact with other people was very limited. In addition, I have experienced repetitive behaviors and had a hard time adjusting to a new routine. I was diagnosed with the currently common disease at the age of two. The diagnosis would come to a shock to not just my parents, but also the rest of my family. Even though I was diagnosed with autism, I also showed signs of an autism spectrum disorder called Asperger's Syndrome. People with this syndrome often lack non-verbal communication skills and don't show proper emotion to situations a regular person would usually show when dealing in a scenario, such as a person losing his or her job. I always considered myself to have high-functioning autism, due to the fact I would function more like a "regular" than a person that has Asperger's syndrome or any other autism spectrum disorder. My definition of being "regular" is being in perfect health with every part of your body working properly. When I was growing up, I knew how much my life would be different from members from my family.

A few years after being diagnosed with a puzzling disorder, which nowadays affects 1 to 66 people, I started attending a daycare facility in the St. Joan of Arc Parish Center. I was placed in a classroom with other "regular" kids, so teachers can observe how I do in a regular classroom environment. I have rode in a regular bus with "regular" kids for the very first time during my stay at St. Joan of Arc Parish Center. Due to the fact I lacked communication skills, I often screamed and caused trouble just to get my teachers attention. I was often constrained by a teacher when we had music therapy. In addition to poor communication skills, I had some developmental delays for reading and learning. As a matter of fact, it took me about the age of five or six to read a single page from a simple book such as Cat in the Hat. The best thing I loved the most about being in the St. Joan of Arc Parish Center, was when I'd get a chance to use a computer. Snack time was also a good time for me as I gulped down a small box of apple juice and delicious graham crackers. Gym time was especially fun when I gotten a chance to play bowling and throw bean bags. As I finally departed from the doors of St. Joan of Arc Parish Center, my life would get more different from that point on.

In the year of 1993, I started my school life at Isaac Dickson Elemen-

tary School. My elementary school was only a minute away from my home address at the time, 100 Atkinson Street. I grew up in a public housing apartment complex called Hillcrest Apartments. I am the second child of three sons from my beautiful, strong mother. As I was now part of the 1 and 66 autism statistic, I was the only person in my huge family who has autism. My mama stayed home to care for me and my little brother Tory, while my dad Preston Brown worked at a printing plant to provide for his family. When I started my first day at Isaac Dickson Elementary School, I immediately realized how different my life would be compared to other "regular" students. While most students rode in a 20-seat school bus, I rode the short eight-seat school bus which included wheelchair accessibility. Unlike regular school buses, the short buses come equipped with seat belts and harnesses. Some kids, including myself had to be restrained in a harness because they could not control themselves on a seat. My classroom had five other classmates and three teachers. Despite being in a classroom with five other disabled kids, I usually stayed to myself. Isolating myself from my peers was not a surprise to me since people with autism have a hard time interacting with other people. I was grateful to be surrounded by teachers who will break their back to be sure every "special" student gotten the best education and attention.

As a young kid growing up with autism, I experienced behaviors that were unbelievable to not only my teachers, but my parents as well. Because of my inability to speak in complete and coherent sentences, I often screamed and yelled to get attention. In extreme cases, I would throw the most violent temper tantrums. My temper tantrums would consist of throwing various objects and physically hitting people. At one point, my behavior was so rambunctious and terrible that my teachers have called my parents to come pick me up, and I was forced to stay out of school for about a week. I would often put myself in danger by wandering miles and miles away from my teachers and even my parents. As a matter of fact, when I was just three or four years old, I wandered so far away from home on my tricycle that my mother feared for the worst. My behavior was also carefree, due to the fact I did things that was dangerous. When I was four or five years old, I threw my small toy basketball to the glass ceiling light bulb cover and badly cut my hand. My hand injury was so bad; it required several stitches.

Not only I had problems with my behavior, I had problems with understanding stuff that was told by someone else. I usually had to have social stories written to me so I can understand what was told to me. As a matter of fact, I had a crush on one of my teachers Mrs. Watley, and I did not clearly understand why Mrs. Watley cannot be a friend to me. I also had crushes on older female students. One of the female students was a girl named Anastasia. I loved that girl so much, I would barge in her teacher's classroom to just to see her whenever I had the opportunity to do it. When my teachers knew I barged in Anastasia's classroom, my class and I would often make long detours to our other classes to avoid passing by Anastasia's classroom. My teachers would have to keep me away from Anastasia, because I spent the

whole lunchtime staring at her. My dad was also concerned, due to the fact Anastasia was causing me to lose focus in school. The other reason my dad was concerned about the situation, because he found that Anastasia treated me like crap. At the time, I did not understand why everyone was trying to keep me away from Anastasia. It would be about 3 years later until I finally realized that Anastasia was clowning me along with her friends. I was subliminally made fun by Anastasia just because of my disability.

By the time I was in the fifth grade, I immediately knew how far different I was from my classmates with the same disability. While my classmates checked their schedule with laminated picture cards, I checked my schedule using a paper list on a clipboard. In addition, I started attended classrooms with the "regular" students. One of my first "regular" classrooms I have attended was Mr. Mosconi's classroom. I was only in them "regular" classrooms for at least one hour per week. Unlike the autistic students who often needed constant assistance, I tend to be more independent. Because of my desired independence, I have earned the opportunity to place mail in the school faculty's mailboxes. It was one of my favorite activities I have did when I was in the fifth grade. My other favorite activity I have did in that year was playing chess in the school's chess club. I had the most wins outta everyone in the entire club. I would have placed in first the chess club if I was keeping track of chess moves on a piece of paper. As I took my last test at Isaac Dickson Elementary School, I felt like I have accomplished something in my life.

Speaking of accomplishments, I have managed to make plenty of them in my adolescent years. One of my accomplishments I was proud to achieve was receiving first place medals back-to-back in the Special Olympics. I have participated in the Special Olympics from the age of 6 until the age of 11 or 12. The ten yard dash was one of my favorite events in the Special Olympics. When I was in the second and third grade, I had the honor to make a few appearances in a WLOS News segment focusing on autism. My mama even managed to place her face in the news! I even remember myself saying, "I want to make my pets feel better like my guinea pig." One of my proudest moments occurred back in 1998 at a summer camp for special-needs children. I have received the "best rapper" award for rapping to an African drum in front of the crowd of 100 people. It was that moment when I discovered my talent for music. Even though my accomplishments were important in my life, I would have more accomplishments to come in my life.

By the age of 12, I arrived to Asheville Middle School. I was in the same classroom setting as the one in back in elementary school. The transition from elementary school to middle school was like moving to a whole another planet. My routine in middle school was similar to my routine in elementary school, except with a few differences. One of those differences was I had more opportunities to be in a "regular" classroom setting. For example, I was in "regular" home economics, English, and math classes in the seventh grade. One thing that have changed when I went to middle school was I became more determined to be much of a "regular" student as I can. My "spe-

cial" classroom was next door to a classroom that consisted of students with serious behavioral problems.

By the time I have reached the eighth grade, I was more determined than ever to break away from the routine of a "special" classroom. At the same time, my family and I had just moved from Asheville to Arden. Before I had went back to school for my eighth grade year, I had a choice to stay at Asheville Middle School, or go to Valley Springs Middle School. I have decided to stay at Asheville Middle, because I did not wanted to leave all of the friends I have already knew. My morning routine in the eighth grade consisted of nothing but "regular" classes. As a matter of fact, I had a pre-algebra class around 9am until 11am, followed by an English class lasting from 11:30am until 2:00am. The only time I have went in my "special" classroom was to work on my classwork and homework assignments. I even went on all the field trips with the "regular" class. The one thing I took with me as I graduated from Asheville Middle School, was that only I can decide my future. I would probably be stuck in my "special" classroom for my whole middle school life if I would not made the decision to venture out to the "regular" world.

Because of my disability, I did not have much of a social life. Whenever I had some play time at school, I usually stayed to myself and never socialized with the other students. My disability has also left me with a speech impairment. For that reason, I required extensive speech therapy from the beginning of elementary school until the 8th grade. In my speech therapy sessions, I would recite the words shown on flash cards and say the correct punctuation. I never had many close friends when I was growing up, because of my speech problem and my apathy for socialization. While most kids played outside after school, I usually stayed to myself in my room playing video games and watching TV. It was on very rare occasions that I got to on outings with people other than my family. I may not had any friends, but I did have a lot of people watching out for me.

My first year of high school as a "regular" student was a life-changing experience for me. I was happy that I was not looked at as that slow kid from the "special" class. Instead, I was viewed as just another young man starting his first year of high school. Even though my school was in the same region as Asheville High School, I still felt like I was another new kid on the block. I even participated in a new student group for students who were coming from other cities, states, and countries. Despite me being in a school I originally did not wanted to be in, I have decided to tough it out and make the best out of the situation.

When I was growing up, people have always treated me love and respect despite the fact that I had a disability. It was not until I have entered the eleventh grade when I started to become a constant target of disrespect. The "other kids" would call me names such as "retarded" and "slow", which offended me. They would imitate my speech and movement to make fun of me. I could not understand why cruel and ignorant people would want to make my high school a living hell. At one point, I have picked up a chair, raising it

above my head to act like I was going to throw it at the mean students in an attempt to scare them into stop bullying me. They would also take my rolling book bag and roll it around the hallways and keep it away from me. I Sometimes, I did not even wanted to get up in the morning because of the constant bullying.

When I was a junior back in 2004-2005, my popularity of the school started to soar. What really pushed my popularity to greater heights was when I started rapping at pep rallies. My popularity also came from the fact that I was a water boy for the varsity football team. I have got suggested to rap at pep rallies by my former physical science teacher, Ms. Sanders. The moment that I first performed at a pep rally, I felt like I was in control of the entire gymnasium. Performing my rap songs was an escape from the pain and suffering I have felt dealing with my disability. I loved the attention that I got from the students and staff. For example, I would get asked by students to do freestyle raps during lunch hour. Despite my popularity, it was not enough to get me nominated for homecoming or prom king. I really did not care if I gotten the title of homecoming and prom king, because I would later earn the title as the most unforgettable male senior of 2006. I was very surprised when I have gotten that title, due to the fact a well-known girl named Wyntre (the most popular girl in the entire school at the time), have gotten the title as the most unforgettable female senior of 2006.

One of proudest moments occurred on May 12, 2006, the day I have finally graduated from TC Roberson High School. As I dressed myself up and my cap and gown, I began to reminisce on the painstaking years it took me to get to that point of my life. Tears came down from my mama's eyes as she seen her only autistic son graduate in top of my class. The moment that my name was called, I immediately knew that I was transitioning to the real world. The first thing I did as a newly high school graduate was going to my Grandma Essie's house. While over there, a man was passing a hat around to collect dollar bills under my behalf. He was also letting people know that I have beat the odds dealing with autism spectrum disorder. Later that night, I was invited to a post-graduation party where I had a time of my life. From that day forward, I entered into the real world as an adult dealing with Asperger's Syndrome.

As a young man fresh out of school, going to college wasn't a part of my plan at the time. I wanted to earn my own income by joining the work force. Unfortunately, getting a job as an autistic man was extremely difficult. Despite filling out job applications for places such as McDonald's and Ingles, I was still jobless. I felt like an ex-convict getting a job. I had to participate in job sampling sessions with a job coach from Irene Wortham Center before landing my very first job in the summer of 2006. I worked as a movie usher at Regal Cinemas (now known as Carolina Cinemas). The only good thing that I loved about working as a movie usher was being able to watch movies for free. Despite working in an easy, relaxing job position, I often desired to work in challenging job positions such as a cashier and food server. Because of

my disability, I didn't get considered for positions that didn't consist of mostly manual labor. At the end of the day, I was grateful to have an income and to have a feeling of independence.

As of today, I am a determined, intelligent, lovable, and ambitious 27-year-old full-time student at Asheville Technical Community College. I have never let my disability interfere with my goal of getting a college degree. Ever since starting my two-year degree program, I made the Dean's List in 2013 and the President's List in 2014. Despite growing out of problematic behaviors from elementary school, I still experience some symptoms associated with autism. For example, I have major anxiety issues when things don't go my way. In addition, I often blurt out words that I think about, even words or phrases that I don't mean to say. My speech is still impaired but most people can understand what I'm trying to say now. I'm currently going to one-on-one therapy sessions at TEACCH Center to help me with the issues that autistic adults go through every day. Even though life as an autistic adult can be depressing sometimes, I have to keep my head up and enjoy life as just another human being.

Strolling Through Pack Square
by kadie sanders

Pocket Stuff
by lin h. orndorf

Stitched flat like a patch,
Hidden within a seam
Or a roomy front pouch where left meets right
With fingers laced or crossed or flipping someone off
Pockets are wonderful things

High above a breast or low on a thigh
Some are deep, some shallow
Some functional and real
Others are completely false,
An illusion of a pocket, nothing more

Pockets provide security and comfort
Chapped fingers and hands retreat from the cold winter wind
Staying safe and snug in the folds of a coat or in the front of blue jeans
Wallets are kept handy in tight, butt pockets
Maybe too handy sometimes for buying things we don't really need nor can afford

Pockets conceal signs of who we really are
Things that we carry inside
Are sometimes revealed by the treasures we keep
The lighters, pebbles, seashells, and string
Souvenir memories of adventures and dreams
Each night we empty our pockets with reverence and grace
Carefully placing their contents on a nightstand, vanity, or shelf like saintly relics on a sacred altar
Still safely hidden in the darkness of night

An odd paper clip
The key to a lock long lost
A lover's note
The shopping list scored through with a blue ink pen
And coins that remain at the end of the day

A pocket knife and tiny screwdriver for repairs and amends
The token from a distant city's transit system
A ticket stub from a movie, concert, or play
The receipt from a first date meal or a last with a companion now gone

A list of books to read tells its own tale within a pocket's story
One of suggestion, direction, and desire
Dovetailed with constraints of time, restriction of funds, resistance to conformity
And fantasies tinted with regret's patina

Fuzzy gray lint from disguises and garments once worn
Mingles with white sand grains from the ocean's edge home
Of the beach glass worn down and worn smooth
By the water's perpetual motion folding and rushing onto the shore
The tide empties its pockets with each receding wave
Leaving its trinkets exposed on the beach
Only to be collected again and again

Middle of the Night
by makenzie peterson

1.
I'm too tired to write.
Please don't yank me from that world again.
Don't find my loose ends.
Don't you know not to pull at threads?
Let me trail off of the garment of my own life.
Let me weave myself further and further out.
I know it's hard there too but at least I don't have to make decisions.
At least when I feel something I won't question it raw.

Give me sewer's tape like a band aid.
Maybe now is the time to spin out of the thing I was.
A new dress altogether.

I know it's all rough baby.
I know it's hot to the touch.
Sometimes you like it
and sometimes it burns.

2.
Maybe I'll catch you next sunrise, happiness.
I haven't been as diligent as I used to be,
standing out in wait for you.

But I am coming to respect myself more than this!
You have to want me back if this will ever work. I can't
keep chasing and pining for you, it looks pathetic.
It's not long before I get over you, happiness.
I'm getting stronger now, I'm close to turning
my back on you for the last time.
I can feel it.

3.
Wood grain
can become a haven,
a beautiful and intricate
solitude from the world.

I could stare into wood grain
for the rest of my life, it could
keep me from the rest.

4.
The birds are outside my window
or I have them in my hands and I sit
at the window. The birds
screech and clatter
until I knock my papers off
the bed and struggle at the sill.
I run outside and watch them
all burst from the tree like the plague
and it's so loud.

5.
Please
don't put any more of your truths
in my pockets.
I always fill them with heavy things
and when they break,
it takes me months to get out of bed
and mend them.
Anyways, I lost all of my needles
and you knew that.

Untitled
by parker louise bobbitt

Aviary Undressed
by magnolia wilson

You've been beating at my window for days,
Lapping up the cobwebs in the corner.

While the dishwater separates my cuticles from their beds
I am building you a home, built with sticks and spit
And flatware stolen from the neighborhood diner.
However ornately constructed, it welcomes no one.

But I grow weary of your incessant rapping
And cannot continue to weave ribbons through the roof.
Mites get in, gnaw at your quills, and you begin
To imagine your own extinction.

Bladed hands chop the water, disrupting the greasy suds
Until they wilt and pop. My fingers become as milky
White as the sun-bleached bones of those who came before you.

I press my pelvis into the linoleum counter,
Allowing these thoughts to pour out
And over the sink. Like water's chill before it scalds,
You can't feel the burn until it's already scarred you.

Recommended Reading for Smokers
by zach walters

oh effigy of spoken word
you lisp articulate
matter-of-fact stabs of the tongue
leave it to the smokers
to write a book about lungs
the illusion of the grandeur of words.
call me after the final purge
we can sit in the silence
desecrating our monuments.

New Year's Day
by ellen perry

Linda hated New Year's Day something fierce. Always had. Never mind the business about new beginnings and opportunities, hopeful resolutions and blank slates. It all started, she guessed, when she was a child in the 1970s and her parents sat around on innumerable January-the-firsts and watched, worn through and grateful for the chance to rest, the Rose Parade. They were normal working folks in Tupelo, Mississippi, enjoying normal-folk activities like watching parades and reading the newspaper. Not normal at all, Linda recoiled from the sight of the flowers, sensing their imminent decay; the Pasadena sunlight was too bright in contrast with her dark moods, the heavy fragrance pungent in her nostrils. She could smell the dying roses through the TV screen. The floats processed slowly, funeral-like, moving through molasses with smiling zombies waving to everyone and no one, and she wanted to run away fast, shake off the feeling she couldn't name as a child. Linda soon came to recognize this feeling as dread. If she ran fast enough, she could outrun it. If she kept busy enough, she could escape.

As she got older, though, dread would sneak up on her at times other than January 1. Early mornings as a teenager Linda would wake up with a start, not knowing how to quell the panic except to put on a cute new outfit and parade around the high school halls. With her long dark hair and deep brown eyes, Linda had lots of chances to wave and collect her own roses, one by one, no matter which boy gave them to her, no matter the occasion. She pressed the flowers when they were in their prime just like her mother showed her, but she rarely looked at them later; the horror of their passing luster was too much. Linda collected dazzling moments like flower petals and seized them, tucking them away once the novelty passed, dashing from one bit of excitement to the next.

At college Linda's trusted coping mechanism dissolved. There wasn't a lot of fun to be had anymore since there was no money for sorority life at Ole Miss, just the dreadful experience of knowing (through the example of her parents' situation—they had owned a carpet installation business that finally went under) she had to buckle down to make a life for herself. Linda tried to focus, study, and choose a major. She came to understand how little she knew about much of anything, and fearful dread made itself known almost every day.

This new reality was a jolt but Linda found small distractions along the way, just enough to push her forward through the tedious first-year general education classes. One distraction was Daniel, a law student who was the T.A. in her Political Science class, though she didn't mean to marry him or anybody, exactly; it happened quickly, derailing her education but taking her down what she thought would be a more stimulating path, a parade route filled with social engagements and country clubs. While her beauty and quietly sweet demeanor made a big impression on Dan's family and friends, Linda

knew her parents were pleased that she had some sort of direction. They even offered to spend the last of their meager savings on a small wedding. Before Linda could catch her breath, though, Dan's mother and aunt had eagerly planned and coordinated all details of their elaborate May wedding at the club. Dan's father signed the checks without question.

After they were married Dan would often say, "Pour me a drink, Lin," and she'd do it. He was a jovial and kind enough fellow, Dan, with Ken-doll looks and lots of hobbies. Before long they had a daughter and the dread came back full force like a virus. Fevered, Linda would look at baby Elizabeth and think, "Where did she come from?" As a new mother, she did her best. Elizabeth flourished in her dance classes and asked to take baton lessons when she was eight years old. She collected stickers and had a white canopy bed. Linda drove her daughter everywhere, did everything, exercised constantly, tried to outrun the dread on her treadmill.

They all watched the Rose Bowl game together on TV every New Year's Day with Dan's friends from the firm and their neighbors down the street. Linda welcomed each guest and made cookies, laughed until her jaw ached, tried to survive the day without anyone knowing how terrified she was, how different from everyone she felt. She knew everything was a façade, ready to fall apart at any minute. Nothing felt real, genuine, or authentic. Only Dan's colleague Richard saw Linda's struggle, called her out one day on the screened-in porch overlooking their tidy Oxford neighborhood.

"Hey, you always run off during the games," he said casually, beer in hand. "Don't like football?"

Linda jerked herself out of the foggy distance and attempted to cover her tracks. "Oh, I love it, I just had to check the..."

"I don't like football," Richard interrupted.

"What?"

"I don't. And I can't stand that parade. But, what are you going to do?" He shrugged helplessly.

For about ten years, off and on, Linda and Richard planned expensive dates and romantic trips as a way to escape together. Somehow they managed to keep it secret, or at least not talked about in polite company. The intensity of the highs and lows helped Linda survive the tedium of days, and Dan had his own dalliances and interests. The arrangement seemed to work ("Stay together for your child," Linda's mother told her) until Elizabeth came home from college one Labor Day weekend and brought a book from her "Mississippi Writers" class. She tossed it on the floor near the coffee table then collapsed on the couch.

"What's this?" Linda asked.

"Oh, some dumb thing I'm supposed to read a chapter in for Tuesday."

Her eye drawn to the Mississippi images on the cover, Linda picked up the book and went out to the porch, watching as Elizabeth soon sped off in her convertible to meet some friend or other. We are just alike, Linda thought,

sighing. It was quiet outside in the suburbs, and Linda was alone, but something shifted in the atmosphere as Linda devoured the anthology for hours; a community of loud voices shook her, Tennessee Williams and Eudora Welty and William Faulkner, and others. She read the passages out loud, over and over.

I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not.

...a sense, an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness of modern experience...

I don't want realism. I want magic!

Dan didn't know what to make of the fact that his wife did so well in her interview for the flight attendant training program in Atlanta, and he was even more confused when she filed for divorce. Her parents back in Tupelo called, worried about her working on planes with strange people and maybe even terrorists, with no husband to come home to. Linda pushed on, reading Welty: ...here I am, and here I'll stay.

But she didn't stay, not really, not anywhere for long. She kept moving, going, racing through airports and cities and countries, diving deeply into life. Linda tried every flavor of gelato in Rome and cried joyful tears looking up at Bernini's St. Teresa. She clipped like a model down the Champs-Elysées in Paris wearing Chanel pumps. Watching from a tour bus, she caught glimpses of Swiss villages at the base of the Alps and wondered – Faulkner-style – who lived there, why they lived there, why they lived at all. She laughed over dinner with a flight attendant friend on the Santorini hillside, both women bathed in Greek twilight, listening to the ocean rolling slowly below.

Linda spent one Christmas near Elizabeth's apartment in Colorado. They skied, shopped, and talked more than they had in years. Linda met Elizabeth's friends who helped show her the sights and asked about all the places she'd been.

"Mom, do you think you'd ever want to move here?" Elizabeth asked as they all sat by the ski lodge's massive fireplace.

"No, it's too cold," Linda laughed. "If I settle down anywhere, it will be someplace warm."

"Yeah," Elizabeth said. "I don't know where I'll end up either."

Right after the Colorado trip Linda went back to work. She had a morning flight then a lunch date with a pilot in the Atlanta airport. He had asked her on the date weeks before, but she kept putting him off; finally she had no more excuses. They met outside P. F. Chang's, thousands of travelers bustling around them.

Linda reveled in humanity's comings and goings, arrivals and departures; the pilot just seemed frazzled and overwhelmed.

"Hi, Linda, good to see you again," he said, "I hope you like Chinese. Or Asian. Not sure exactly what kind of food this is, haha..." He cleared his throat and pulled out her chair.

Linda was 47 years old. She was beautiful in her royal blue dress and red scarf but more than that, she felt sure of herself and her place in the

world. She met the pilot's gaze and felt a little sorry for him, blabbering like that. He talked some about the difference between jams and jellies, showed a few pictures of his grown boys, and she smiled. He had sad blue eyes, graying hair, expensive Italian shoes, and a wallet-full of platinum credit cards.

"Hope we can do this again sometime," the pilot said as he paid the bill. "It's lonely, you know, after divorce. Especially at the holidays."

Linda nodded politely but she wasn't a bit lonely.

"Oh, look, the Rose Parade is on," the pilot said, looking up at the restaurant's big-screen TV. "You want to watch the game later?"

"No, thanks, I've got to catch a flight," Linda said, glancing up at the waving beauty queens and fresh flowery floats. "Happy New Year!"

For the first time in her life, she meant it.

Shepherd in Dresden

by evan lehmann

Warm December
by hannah eicholtz

December, in shorts, above warm pavement
My bicycle unfolding motions, with arms open
A bird. Your head on concrete, the sun
Closing your eyes, body curved towards me
Wind and air. Your hair licked with blood.

I will be forgiven then, for how much I love.
How much pain I will cause myself, is more.
Before this abnormal day in December,
We were rested in feeling, slumbering in melodies.
If you wake, and I am not there, but here,
How can I say all that I meant to say?

Melodies, they do not fall and die,
they are in the breeze. But you are as dead
As the trees, as dead as my heart.

You'll say it's strange, a feeling as fleeting as
This day, and how would you know.
My hair is made of strands, those strands are
Made of fibers, some of which you may
Have never touched.

Today I feel that I will never be forgiven
For the magic I have, and what I choose to do,
will be mistaken for love or other feelings.
Because I will stay, until it is colder.
Until the blood is a slick and icy patch.

No Posh to Pish In
by oskar gambony-steding

Spectrums bend my eyes,
kaleid in blinking breaths
Like residual foam of waves crashed
A clenched fist stirs the rising bubbles
Too tiny to pop
Already nothing

I wipe the sweat from my face
Try to ignore the pitter patter
of these icicle stilts
dripping

It's almost the same
Raising my head while sinking,
bowing my head while rising

I decide not to mention the 23 minutes
counting down
on your microwave as you ask
what my name was again
Though you described in length
how it vibrated down your tongue,
shook your lips
Saying it again, and again
only hours ago

When two bodies
and hot breath
were the only thing
keeping your room from
Emptiness

My body shook
I could hear its resonance
Like strings on a harp
(Alice Coltrane's)

The room is full now,
empty of possibility
It is cold
And reeks of
nothing in particular

Spilling
by grey wolfe lajoie

This morning, driving to work
I thought I saw my father
Hobbling down the road
Fading through fresh fog
With long wild hairs

He stood there a while
A drunken wobble
Monster's eyes
Details worn away by decades
Like an old grey statue
Staring at me

Only the pigeons
Are allowed to know him
To feel his concrete skin
To cover him in their shit

I want to get out at the intersection
Ask the statue where he's been,
If he could give me some advice
I have this problem, you understand

Instead, my skin starts to wilt and I scream

Maybe if I close my eyes
And close my throat and close my nose
And put my hands by my sides
Then I could listen to her
She asks "do you have any songs
That remind you of him"
I say yes and sometimes I get drunk
And yell them at strangers
And she laughs

All I want is to kneel in the shower
Spoon her conscience, taste her intuition
But sometimes she's the one on the ground
And she has to get on her knees
In front of an altar
And look for something
Rock back and forth
While the litany rolls through her
What do you think of that?
I think I think
I think enlightenment is an orgasm?
We are both dizzy with inexperience
Sweet and shallow
People watching
With dirty fingernails

Sometimes she has to smoke, dad
And it smells just like you.

Fabric Form
by marklar klepac

Displacement Theory
by magnolia wilson

Fingers, blackened by citrus flesh, cradle her skull.
Purple curtains breathe like an iron lung
ventilating farther from the window screen as the storm draws near.
She watches rainwater fill the barren potted plant and
I thought, you lend yourself to me the way magnetic attraction is only one sided.

Overflowing at the brim, dirt is freed from its vessel.
Thought of my displacement theory, I wasn't full before but I was entirely my own.
Something is lost.

Tongue pressed against the nape of her neck
feels like weights hanging from organs.
The greatest pleasure is never without discomfort.

Fingers, blackened by dried blood, press soft abandon into her skull.
Thought of the bear, whose body swallows the baby if not well nourished.
What if I'm not strong enough to bare it?

Fingers, blackened by tar stains, turn her skull toward the sky,
watch as her problems moltiply,
become grounded by the sight of a writhing beetle,
the way exoskeleton meets wood planks,
maybe I was never meant to be on my back.

Tell Me, You're Not Dead
by micala smith

She is there and then
Goes blue.
Completely frozen lady
Stills the room,
Her head cocked, no breath.

Flipped beneath the skin,
Her fingers twitching as frantic legs search,
Stuttered shoulder has the metal fix.
I help her hold herself
There's not much else.

The gasp comes back blaring,
Room turned to fuzz.
She searches for her body,
Tugging through skin and Velcro,
The devil's rhythm shakes from her soles,
Feet switched around.

Says a prayer to stay with herself
Scatters the numbers, asks the bathroom
Tells herself about god,
Those bewildered eyes only
Want to know what she's got.
She knows what she wants:
"Shampoo, shampoo, three, four, three, jesus love me, sleep."
You can't hold someone back from dying.

Seams
by jeff horner

His belly is what I remember first. Uncle Jimmy carried his gut like he was preparing for the birth of the Messiah. It entered every room before him. It became the impetus of every conversation and metaphor. "Don't ever trust a skinny man," he'd say. "They're too hungry to pay you mind."

His belly hung symmetrical, strong; its roundness defied gravity; its protrusion, a natural fit to Jimmy's squat, wrestler's body. He still moved with an athlete's grace, creating the illusion the belly held the center he moved in constant orbit around.

"I've earned this baby," he'd say, standing on the deck of his above-ground pool, bare-chested, barely contained inside those tiny shorts old men swim in, and already on the fourth beer of the afternoon. After a few laps of back-strokes – "So she can get some air" – he'd climb back onto the deck and smack his stomach, and I remember the sound, like striking a tympani, reverberating off the aluminum siding. "You'll earn yours, too. Soon enough," he'd say. I'd watch the handprint disappear into his dark tan.

^^^^^

I love The Seamster most because I assume you would.

The Community Organizer has potential, sure. He has his own store-front right on Broad Street, his name stenciled proudly in Garamond. You come by for lunch and see him through the glass with his feet propped up on that ridiculously giant desk, his tie loosened, the soles of his pragmatic shoes worn thin. He's invested in a phone call, and maybe he's speaking with force at whom-ever on the other end isn't living up to his meticulous standards, and maybe now he notices you and waves you towards the one other chair in the room with a smile. He holds his hand over the mouthpiece. "Just a second, my love."

He would care too much. The fantasy always flickers out. I can smell my own clinginess all over it.

The Musician may be too easy because he's who you left me for, be-cause he's who you leave everyone for. His supple fingers slide across a guitar or a piano or maybe something brass you've decided you prefer that weekend. You find yourself making excuses to get a drink the same time he does.

"You like cheap bourbon, too?"

You find yourself thinking of children's names that border on the pre-tentious: *Forte*, or *Allargando*. He gets lost onstage, swaying to a rhythm separate from the song, and you feel ignored in a way that rings ancient bells inside of you.

I rarely stick with this one too long. It hurts, and I don't like forgiving the ghost of your father.

The Seamster, though: he's distant enough, intelligent and creative, defined by no gender, and hits every note on your scale.

^^^^^

"Good thing the girls take after your Aunt Lynn," my mother would say.

She despised her brother. She rarely attended the barbeques Jimmy had, which seemed to happen weekly once the weather turned. And my father was always who-knows-where doing god-knows-what, so beyond special occasions, I was the only one from our side of the family attending. I did so religiously.

Because Mom was right. My cousins, all long legs and lean with elegant, sharp features, not only shared their mother's good looks, but her easy kindness and affection. Evelyn is my age; Ellen and Eve, a year and two years after. Aunt Lynn taught English locally, and never quite perfected a joke about their names being in reverse syllabic order. Jimmy would say they just got lazier with each child.

Aunt Lynn became a guerrilla hugger after a few wine coolers. She'd come up from behind, and teenage me couldn't help but feel the length of her. "You are growing into *such* a man," she'd say. "You'll be *such* a heartbreaker." She smelled of lavender, even on the hottest day. Uncle Jimmy claimed he smelled of sex, and that's why the girls were so close in age. He'd squat deep like a sumo wrestler, smack his belly, and send the girls screaming with pinches while he shouted gibberish Japanese – all except Evelyn, of course, who inherited his joyous sense of impropriety and his ability to grow dark in the summer. She'd squat, too, but would only attack me.

"*Such* a heartbreaker, *such* a man," Sumo-Evelyn would say. She smelled of lavender as well.

^^^^^

The Seamster lives in that old stone office building off of Fourth – you know, that area just poor enough to still be chic. It's been divided into a thousand flats by the gay couple who subsidize rent for artistic types they believe worthy enough. It's their creative movement, they say. It's their way to give back.

You walk right in because he told you to, because he never locks his door, because he has nothing to hide. You're struck by the smell of a lavender candle, and it seems like he's forgotten you're coming, because he's standing on his head supported by his elbows wearing nothing but those tiny, old man shorts. World music drifts from the speakers situated around the large room, echoing off the vaulted ceilings. He hasn't acknowledged you yet. And you have a thing for Yoga bodies. And he's hiding nothing.

^^^^^

When we were sixteen, Evelyn picked me up one school night in her '86 Chevy Blazer. I squeezed in the back between two popular girls who would continue ignoring me when we next saw each other. In shotgun sat a loud visiting friend everyone called "Fibs" who kept smacking the dashboard, demanding fun.

"Is this what you call fun?" She demanded, slurring already. "This is not what I call fun." Her belly had nothing on Jimmy, and it was also not fun.

A case of cheap beer got shoved between my legs. I was told frequently I was sitting "bitch." Joints started floating around from all directions. Eventually, even Fibs admitted fun was being had, but I quickly became nauseous, but felt too embarrassed to turn anything down.

The girl to the left of me leaned forward, pulling her shirt low. "Do you

like the color of my bra?" I said that I did. "Look, the underwear matches!" I said that was great.

The girl to the right of me began slowly moving her hand down my inner thigh under the Ocean Pacific shorts I was so proud of owning. "Are you scared yet? Are you scared yet?" I said I was once when I felt it was polite to be so. And I was scared, and thrilled, and waiting for Evelyn to stop the whole affair. "That's my cousin!" I expected her to yell. But her eyes only sparkled in the rear view mirror.

I now appreciate I was some kind of test subject. I have no idea what was expected of me, but I assume I failed.

^^^^^

The Seamster's studio is sectioned off into little, open partitions. Here is his own carefully selected wardrobe hanging off of store racks he got god-knows-where from who-knows-who. That far corner is a random selection of instruments, some even you don't recognize. This is his library: books on feminist theory you've yet to read, a selection of vinyls articulating a well-crafted taste. And now, quite out in the open, is his mattress, large and unadorned, lying flat on the floor, and made. You'll ask later – after – why. "I don't separate art," he'll say.

But now, still standing on his head, he says, "Whenever you're ready, love." You reply you are ready, at least, you think you're ready, and you admit to being nervous, which is something you never admit.

"Well," he says, curling nonchalantly onto his feet, "the dress will fit better if I measure you nude, but that's your choice, of course." You stutter that's fine, that he had warned you as much. You take off your shoes and stare at your feet. The cold stone burns.

"Okay, then strip, and let's pick out what you want." He walks towards the corner you hadn't noticed yet: fabrics of all types and colors neatly organized by cubby hole, and a table with a sewing machine and every craft tool imaginable. Your breath hitches.

^^^^^

The most indelible image from that Chevy Blazer night happened after Evelyn pulled over on a gravel road for a pee break. I could've relieved myself. I also could've puked. I was too high to make such complex decisions. I stayed firmly put within the safety of the "bitch" seat. The other girls scooted beyond the shoulder into the woods, but Evelyn stepped in front of the truck and de-shorted herself without fanfare.

"Your big ol' fanny's hanging out!" Fibs yelled. Evelyn responded by wiggling said fanny. *That's my cousin*, I thought, but looking away wasn't an option. This was my first experience with real, live female nudity. All that exposed skin - light and dark, those elegant, adolescent lines shimmering in the bas relief of the headlights, and her complete lack of shame created a place inside me I still go when lonely.

^^^^^

"What elegant lines," he says, holding your hand out delicately, measur-

ing from fingers to armpit. You thank him, but he doesn't reply. He's not talking to you. He's talking to the pad of paper he's writing your information on.

You feel his professional touch, his controlled breath, moving across your body. He's gentle, he's graceful, he moves around you as if you're the center of his orbit. You make small talk – little jokes to ease your tension – and he responds perfunctorily.

"You have curves that demand attention," he says. "I know you normally avoid cleavage. I hope you'll allow this piece to be an exception."

You agree. You'd agree to anything – not a realization you normally enjoy. You wait, holding your breath, for his kiss on your shoulder. What you get is a terry cloth robe and the directive to "make yourself at home." He sits at his sewing table. He'll be some time, he says. You sit on a park bench painted mauve and try to read a Foucault novel, but you're flustered, and instead watch the sky change from afternoon to late afternoon to early evening. He turns on one lamp over his workstation. You are ignored in a way that rings an ancient bell.

^^^^^

One barbeque not long after Evelyn's fanny, Uncle Jimmy and I sat on his deck, watching his family kick a soccer ball around. They all wore little dresses pulled over their still wet bathing suits which clung to them painfully as they orbited around each other, laughing each time the ball got stuck in the weeds of the horseshoe pit.

Those are my cousins, I repeated to myself. *That's my aunt.*

My uncle slowly lathered his belly with Hawaiian Tropic Sun Tanning Lotion, rubbing in a methodical, circular motion. Occasionally, he'd hold out his beer for me to sneak a quick sip. I didn't realize he was drunk until he began speaking.

"You know, I cheated on them, right?" He might have said "her," but I remember it as "them." That feels more accurate, anyway.

"No, Uncle Jimmy, I didn't."

"Ha! That's a surprise. I'd thought your mother would've enjoyed that conversation."

We sat a bit longer. He handed me his beer. "Yeah, I've made some mistakes. I can admit that." He fell silent again. I realized he was crying. I realized he was crying and smiling, slowly rubbing his belly.

"I won't tell, Uncle Jimmy."

He shook his head. "Sometimes, you think you know, fella."

Only years later did I recognize that expression. I saw it in the mirror. It was wonder. It was amazement at his own ignorance.

^^^^^

He helps you into it, The Seamster, flattening the straps over your shoulders delicately. He turns you to a full length mirror, hands on your hips. Your friends are right, he's a genius. The dress is daring and suggestive, yet still simple and understated. It is both sexual and pragmatic, both special occasion and random errand. You feel you understand your own body better by wearing it. Your eyes meet in the mirror, and for the first time all day, he's looking at you.

He growls lustfully. "What beauty," he says, and you decide he means you. You fall back into him.

The fantasy always ends here. I don't know what you falling back into me would feel like. I don't even know how a conversation sounds that ends with you giving me one inch of credit. I miss you, but I'm not The Seamster, or The Organizer or Musician. I'm something else. I hope you're doing well.

^^^^^

It made sense I should make Jimmy's funeral arrangements. After you, I'd moved back to town, mainly to accomplish something, and to have that accomplishment feel safe. Lynn died suddenly in her fifties, and that summer, the entire family pitched in to raise Uncle Jimmy's spirits. Even my mother attended barbeques, and she'd try to pretend she found Jimmy funny, but his jokes became rote, soulless. My mother could only keep the charade up for so long. Eve and Ellen felt the responsibilities they now had all over the world, and Evelyn was raising a mess of boys a few states over. Soon, everyone drifted back to their own lives.

I had little else going on, so I'd come over once or twice a week. We'd sit on the deck passing the same beer. He'd still wear those shorts, only when evening came, he'd ask I grab him a blanket from inside for his legs. His belly stopped entering rooms first. It sagged more than before, and I noticed the network of stretchmarks surrounding it, creating the illusion his belly was sewn in that way, and could bust free at any time. It was no longer a metaphor, or a center to be orbited, just extra fat pinning him into chairs.

When I found Jimmy floating in the pool, I wish I could say he was belly-up, but that's the story I tell, anyway.

At his viewing, I gravitated towards Evelyn. She had become her elegant mother, if her mother had lived through as much sadness. She still laughed easily, and it was incredible to see her deal with those rambunctious boys with their wrestlers' builds, but deep lines in her forehead creased when she thought no one was looking. We hugged often.

We found Jimmy's stash of cheap lager at the house afterwards. It seemed right. Jimmy would love that. We built a bonfire and several of us gathered around to share stories. Evelyn's husband and the boys were god-knows-where, so I didn't notice when she and I started holding hands. An ancient bell rang inside me. She smelled of lavender, and she laughed at the jokes you didn't, and her eyes still sparkled when our conversation turned blue. It all seemed right.

"Do you remember my fanny?" she asked, squeezing my forearm.

"I think of it often," I said.

"He cheated on us, you know."

"Yes. I know."

The fire had grown silent. I kissed her cheek, and stood up, wavering a bit. I pulled up my shirt and stuck my belly out as far as it would go. I had nothing on Uncle Jimmy, but I smacked it just the same. A dull thud.

"I earned it!" I shouted.

Guys Just Wanna Have Fun
by oskar gambony-steding

The Emergency Room
by brian longacre

The emergency room was full, had been full for years. Every seat was occupied. Some people stood. A few sat against the wall. Some sprawled. I stepped up to the front desk, tried to catch the sight of the woman sitting there, and waited for her to speak to me as I restrained the stomach cramps writhing through my torso. She spoke a foreign language that she expected me to know, expected everyone to know, and was visibly annoyed when she wasn't understood. I was hurting, and I was ignorant, but mostly I was guilty for hurting, so I followed her vague, pointing gestures and chose not to fight her condescension. I hated her, but hating hurt more, so I moved away from her and the hating of her, hoping the next person would be more human. And so I drifted into the waiting area, following least resistance and an inevitability more than direction.

I found a seat beside a man doubled over in obvious pain, holding his abdomen in one hand, trying to smoke with his other. He had eaten his father's war memorabilia, his letters, journals, medals, and they had lodged and rotted in his liver and his pancreas in spite of the alcohol that chased them. He knew he was going to die; he just wanted less pain and more cigarettes. The young man on the other side of him was bluish because he had been choking for years on pictures of men with women, and women with women, and just women. His bowels were obstructed with videos and his mouth was stuffed with a large, glossy-breasted centerfold. He was smiling. I had eaten a record by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes called "Wake Up Everybody." The brittle vinyl had become shards because I did not chew well enough through college and through my first years in the classroom, so last year, after ten years of teaching, after waking up and trying to teach a new way, the shards sliced my digestive tract, and I bled internally. After coughing up blood in class while lecturing, I was sent home, and from there I came here.

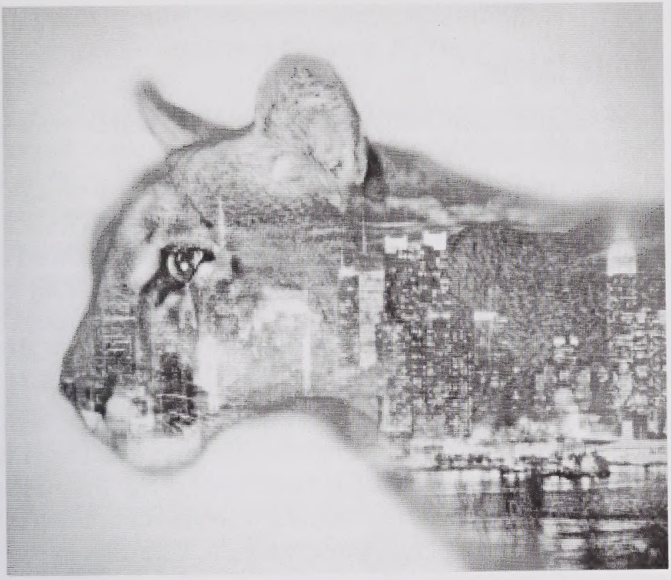
This room is full of others who ate things they shouldn't have and are now littering this purgatorial room, hoping without hope that someone will pump out their stomachs so that they can have a few hours of hunger like they remember before eating something wrong again. The clean-cut guy with the shiny shoes standing next to the bluish kid had eaten an American flag. He vomited most of it up onto his navy suit and red tie, but the stars were stuck in his esophagus. There was a petite woman across from me who was apparently pregnant. She had eaten her boyfriend and the acidity of his slow emasculation had poisoned her bloodstream and stopped gestation. She was stuck in her eighth month for over two years. I saw an old man leaving. His mouth stitched tightly with fishing line, and he stared, grinning, at a photograph of a little boy in a baseball outfit. A nurse in a happy patterned frock escorted him out the door.

Without his mouth, he couldn't eat, and I imagined in that moment that the nurse knew the joke, and she knew his part in the punch line, and knowing seemed to make her shovel him out more determinedly.

My stomach rolled and spasmed. The pain reverberated through my back. But, each of us hurt, and each of us held ourselves, groaning, stretching, unable to cull relief, unable to bribe the pain or punishment with promises of loyalty or obedience, or renewed naiveté, unable to care for the other pains around us. As the trembling minutes passed, I noticed a pattern. For every writhing patient that piled in, one patient exited. Mouths stitched. Nurses steering them with an open hand, always encouraging them to focus on what they held. A photograph. A combination lock. A cell phone. Some bauble that could hold their attention while some manner of drug sheathed their pain, their hunger, their slow dying. One patient in, one out. And I knew that this room would never empty or overflow.

So I stood, and when my stomach pain raged like a solar wind, I ground my teeth and teared, but I would not fold like those around me, doubling over, curling up to die. Instead, I dragged myself back to the front desk. And from the side I could see the rude, foreign receptionist holding her own abdomen with one hand while she coddled jewelry in the palm of her other hand, eating them like small chocolate candies, a plastic bag full of silver and gold at her feet. Then, I noticed a doctor beyond her, standing at the copier, his back turned to me. He was telling someone out of my view that he had eaten his children, and now his wife, "that bitch," was filing for divorce.

I was stunned by the new sense it all made. I turned and looked around the room. I looked over the room, over the bodies that littered this place. I looked over the décor, the absurd care taken to match colors and themes. The symmetry of structure like a lovely executioner. I looked over my pain. I looked over all that I could see or feel, and then I looked at what was there. I saw the sleight of hand. I saw the polite hell, the ruin, the trick of expectation and tradition, and I saw the slaughterhouse and the guards. I could feel the rumbling furnaces; I could smell the smoke, the burning meat, and I turned and walked away from that room, away from that desk, down the hall, trying to exhale everything I saw and now knew, until I came to a door with a small, nondescript sign, "Chapel." And I opened it, and inside it was quiet and dimly lit, and I ate everything I could. I ate the pews, the plastic orchids, the Bible, the altar, the large cross draped with purple cloth, and I cried and begged and pounded my fists against the walls of that miniature church, and when I left, I walked out the doors I had entered. I haven't eaten anything since.



Predator versus Prey

by liz williams

Idly
by grey wolfe lajoie

At the Kmart Super Center, Crutchfield has blood in his stool. He comes to me sometimes for advice, so I know that.

"Can I get fourteen ounces of the Bluefin?" Crutchfield says.

"Blood is the universal symbol of stress," I advise, because I know. Crutchfield furrows his brow, stares into the glass counter between us, all the gleaming gills. Very pensive. He waits for me to put on my stretchy gloves. I can see there is stress, but to tell Crutchfield more than once would counter-produce. In my hand, the fish is frozen in a gasp.

"There's nothing really to worry about," I tell him.

Behind Crutchfield are all the angry hordes, smashing pickle jars, flipping cheese samples. All over town, there are these angry hordes. I can't understand them. The hordes are angry today because all of the libraries are closing or something. Chaos is looming. The burning reflection of looming chaos flickers off my glass counter as we chat, illuminates Crutchfield's face some funny sanguine color, and glows in the blacks of the black fish eyes. The hordes are beyond help, but there is still Crutchfield.

He tells me how difficult it can be to love, and I hand him the fish.

"Have you ever been in love?" he asks me. I keep one hand behind my back, fingers opening and closing. Opening and closing. The latex gives a yelp.

"Once," I say. But really, I hope he doesn't press the subject further.

"At first, it scared me," Crutchfield says, "Deep dark red in the pit of the bowl. The water, pink throughout." Crutchfield has this way of talking, loose wrist waving around his words, long hesitant pauses. Eyes on the gills. "Now though, I'm pretty used to it. It's been three weeks like that." He takes a breath and looks up at me. I have to peel my shirt from the dampness on my chest. Corporate won't let us run the AC. Heat's been bad this summer, dog days all the way through. I tilt my head forward, gaze over the rim of my glasses at Crutchfield, so I can look him in the eyes without seeing too much. I guess I should say something kind to him, wise, but what comes out instead's the price.

Our Kmart Super Center is the last of its kind. A lone oak, jointed lines ribbed out toward dismay. A vanishing corporate cloud, made up of the careful steady drip, our heartbeats. Since he quit last fall, Crutchfield has worked in a wine store. But he used to work right next to me, in Meat. Once, just before he left, out back we found a box of blind kittens. They couldn't open their eyes and they stumbled around in the sun. I wanted to give them away, but Crutchfield convinced me to carry them back to my house. Matted orange fur and cardboard. They wouldn't let the things on the bus so I carried them. Crutchfield lit a cigarette and walked with me and we talked. His voice reminds me of my mother's voice, thick and easy coming

out. I remember, it was fall then, and the sun was orange and the leaves were orange and the ground was covered orange. It was nice.

Rest of the day the other sellers offer samples, coupon machines froth and churn, customers curse each other, the hordes at it with their inferno of change. I just think about Crutchfield. The way he simmers sometimes, like a movie. Sweet wet eyes. How his moustache trembles when he speaks, The trick he does with the cigarette smoke. The way his comb over writhes in the wind. His sorry smile. I love him all.

"Five dollars a pound!" scream the others, "Five dollars a pound!" but I can't. Too much ennui about myself. I know I'm not alone. Others around here have started also to feel some ennui about themselves. Crutchfield, for example. I imagine he stands in his yard these days, rips the cord back with all his wilted strength. Crutchfield is sick. Some kind of heavy cloud of doubt in his stomach. Sky filled with gray, shadows like bruises over his lush lawn. There are certain things that don't work anymore, and one of them is his lawnmower. Ripping the cord, but no rumble to speak of.

There is some disturbance over in Housewares. A woman, shouting. Her hair wild with sweat, a heavy gasping shriek. She shouts at her husband and he paces a small circle. Underneath my kiosk I have a small bottle of bourbon. Now is when I take a nip. The guy keeps pacing and sometimes he kicks this metal trashcan and it gives this rumble. Everyone is staring by now. The girl is just talking. We don't know what she's saying. It's Spanish I guess. She's doing little hops. Guy punches the trashcan again, big rumble, glances at his hand. Punches again with the hand. There's a line of elderly men viewing. Some of them are drinking coffee from little styrofoam cups. I wonder sometimes about this town, with the hordes and all. The woman says I wish you wouldn't get so angry. The man says everyone in this town gets angry. His face is a little heavy with meat and age and I can see two veins in his forehead. She has her fist up, trembling. She says only the garbage men, only the dropouts get so angry. All this is great, but I'm thinking about Crutchfield. Poor Crutchfield.

Everyone keeps on staring at the couple, but now an older woman has arrived and the man just breathes heavily and glances at his hand while the girl cries into her mother. Nothing else happens but we wait.

After work I walk because the buses don't run anymore. On the way I see a man with a brick in his hand, chanting, "Bigger cages! Longer chains!" I smile at him and he hisses. It's a long walk home and my feet hurt, but my heart hurts too. "We are the crisis!" he shouts, "We are the crisis!" but I already know.

At home I lay in bed. I take off my eyeglasses and I lay in the shadows. Without my glasses everything is softer. My eyes go limp and I listen to the hordes. Shouts like thunder. When I close my eyes, all I can picture is

fish. Rows of silver scales. They are chanting something outside my window. What it is I don't care. When will they stop? Where is their ennui? We were all eighteen once and so on.

As I close my eyes I picture the man from earlier, punching the trash-can and staring at his fist. But I can't remember his face, so I see Crutchfield. It's hard to think about. I know Crutchfield is ill, and he knows he is ill, irreparably ill. But we go on like this. There are certain things that are not expressed easily. For Crutchfield, I can speak only through my fish. The snapper for his eyes. A marlin for his fears. Half pound of tuna for the bugs at his feet. Like the coy poet, I show him each lean silver Dory and in this way I shout I love yous. Flipping little mackerels and in this way I say it hurts.

On top of all of this, I am trying to quit smoking. I lay awake most of the night writhing in the heat. Sometimes I go out on the porch to tremble. For sleep, I wear three Nicorette patches. I sit at the edge of my bed and try to arrange the little beige squares for optimal nicotine intake. Some of the shapes I evaluate for effectiveness: V shape, triangle, pyramid, row of diamonds, row of squares. No matter what, I can hardly taste it. I begin to rearrange the furniture.

Jib wakes me up with his coarse licks. I open my eyes and his little rusty face stares up at me. Jib is one of my orange cats. They aren't blind anymore, but they still have problems. Jib has scoliosis. Bish has a tremor. Walter is missing his frontal lobe, so he kills all the flies and gathers them by the door. Meredith bleeds.

Jib leaps from my lap, onto the floor. His spine is a frozen wrinkle, and his back zigs into his neck with each stride. I follow his broken steps into the kitchen. In there, the phone is ringing and Meredith is bleeding on the microwave. A spider lives in the pile of dirty dishes and I can't find my glasses. The phone's ringing is a vibrant black, a thickening ambient welt in my head. I open the fridge and pull out the expired hummus and Koolaid. The phone is still ringing. Outside the hordes are just beginning to blossom into the lungs of the day. Maybe it's Crutchfield calling. I pick up the phone.

"Hello? Hello?" I say. But he has just hung up before I answered. Does the pain ever go away? I want to say. I want to say, the sadness of you breaks my heart. I hang up the phone.

My friends and I are all great proud tragedies, as our fathers were, and their fathers before them. Last week Crutchfield arrived at my stand with a girl by his side. Short blonde locks. I did not like her. Giggles and a sneeze. No ennui at all. She watched me the whole time, waiting for me to give her yet one more excuse to laugh. Her hand resting idly on Crutchfield's arm, dainty and ringless, whispering questions into his ear. I do not like her. I was glad, when it started to rain. The way she panicked through the parking lot. Her blonde locks, heavy and dark. I took a nip of the bourbon then.
Crutchfield says the saddest things sometimes. Just before he left, as the rain picked up, he waved his cigarette at me and told me what nice eyes I had.

blknwht

by oskar gambony-steding

Star-stuff
by barbie byrd

I recently learned how stars are made. In conversation with a friend, who is far more versed in the subject, I found out that nebulas—vast and dense swirling clouds of interstellar gas and dust—are where stars are formed. He called them "star nurseries."

But that really has the wrong connotation. It seems to say that there is some gentle process that nurtures and develops these young stars, but in fact it is a freezing swirling, crashing chaos that leads to a release of kinetic energy and fire and eventually a fusion reaction. There is nothing gentle about this.

Education, for me, has been a lot like this process. I entered college (for the second time) and felt as if I were surrounded by organized chaos. Everywhere I turned I was presented with concepts and ideas I had never considered. I felt like one of those inert particles, blasted on all sides by the pressures of academia. The coalescing of ideas and information was palpable, and sometimes overwhelming.

I think the better analogy would be "star mines." Particles collapse inward under their own gravity, eventually leading to the blazing, burning object we see in our night sky, just as a diamond forms from carbon after millions or billions of years of intense pressure and heat. With exposure to extreme forces a new thing, beautiful and complex, is born.

When education works, at its best and most humbling of moments, it seems a lot like the formation of a star. Immersed in new and challenging material, surrounded by ideas unique and interesting, the mind can formulate something new, something intensely beautiful and exceptional. It seems half magical, and yet it isn't. It also isn't simple. It's chaotic and intense and tremendous. It can be full of elation and it can be devastating; but with time, we mold ourselves to the pressures, we find ways to fit our minds to the information swirling around us, and if we are attentive, and sometimes a bit lucky, sometimes we make something astounding.

"The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star-stuff."
—Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

Parker Louise Bobbitt:
My name is Parker Louise Bobbitt and I have loved drawing and painting for as long as I can remember. This is my second semester at AB Tech where I am working towards my Associate of Fine Arts and Associate of Arts degrees. I plan on transferring to UNCG to major in Communications and Fine Arts.

Sandra Bottinelli:
Sandra's education compiles a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Michigan including studies in Salamanca and Barcelona, Spain. She currently paints and displays her work at whiteSPACE, her studio and gallery, located in the River Arts District of Asheville, while at the same time working towards a second degree in engineering.

Markia C. Brooks:
Markia Brooks is a recent graduate of A-B tech. She now attends UNC Asheville where her major is Creative Writing with an emphasis in poetry and some interest in prose. She seeks to break down stereotypes and redefine tropes, like those assigned to cat-ladies.

Terrence Brown:
I'm a 27-year-old college student who is dealing with the daily hindrances that comes with being autistic. My main purpose of my non-fiction piece is to inform the general public about autism spectrum disorder. My secondary purpose is to entertain them with a wonderful story of growing up with autism. I'm currently adding more to my autobiography story, and I'm hoping to finally publish my life story in a novel one day in the future.

Barbie Byrd:
Barbie wants you to Google her. Google her good.

Hannah Eicholtz:
"Your next dog will look like me," I threatened. A man stood by my parked car and brushed his teeth, pointed to something, said "Isn't that fun to look at?" Interject popular song lyrics. Long for moment similar to when Lindsey Lohan's long lost twin and she discover that they both share an unusual love for dipping Oreos in peanut butter. Bitter about not guessing your right sign, I went to the roof to tan alone.

Oskar Gambony-Steding:
c.f.Dwyane Wayne®

Abigail Hickman:
Abigail Hickman is a recluse who enjoys drinking milkshakes that are too thick for straws.

Jeff Horner:
Jeff is watching you read this.

Marklar Klepac:
"Forgotten Words" and "Fabric Form"
These two photographs are part of a series I took called "Abandoned." They represent feelings of being left behind as well as the tragedy of losing memories.
"Buried Affections"
This poem was my attempt at making death and decomposition seem erotic.

Grey Wolfe LaJoie:
Grey is an upstanding American male with no felonies or misdemeanors. He enjoys smiling and rac`N^ spil.ın 'poʊımzOY#Sdolorem))ipsum4:Ef=wd*H GD..zFJ}D OH GOD I SPILLED SOME THINDS HOW DO I DO I GO BACK I'M NOT GOOD WIT,H COMPUT

Evan Lehmann:
Evan Lehmann was born in Baltimore, Maryland and holds a philosophy degree from SUNY Plattsburgh. A self-taught drawer and enthusiast of things artistic, today he is studying Digital Media at AB Tech in hopes to pursue a career in digital arts.

Brian Longacre:
I have always believed that life is threaded with lines like webs, and these webs occasionally make sophisticated patterns or, like Charlotte's "TERRIFIC," words. These lines are arteries for artists, and good art pumps ink or paint or pencil lead like blood through these arteries, making art as alive as life itself. As a husband, father, son, brother, friend, and Christian, I have thrived on these lines and the love that courses through them has been my life support.

contributors

Natalya Mokritskaya:
I've been interested in many forms of art since I was a small child, and photography was a recent discovery for me. I took a photography appreciation class in the spring of 2014, and I absolutely enjoyed every bit of it and learned for myself that this would be something I will pursue in the future. I also love creating music, painting pictures, collecting quotes, and being sarcastic. My goal is to live happily and creatively.

Mauro A. Nieto:
Mauro is a lover of life and nature, as well a hopeless dreamer. An aspiring teacher devoted to the bettering of this planet, Mauro hopes to transfer to UNCA, and to end procrastination.

Natalya Mokritskaya:
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Lin H Orndorf:
Since moving to Asheville from the Philadelphia area, Lin has had several jobs, but her favorite has been being a student. After completing her degree in Sustainability Technologies at A-B Tech, Lin is currently pursuing a Master's of Science in Sustainability Studies at Lenoir-Rhyne University Center for Graduate Studies of Asheville. Lin lives in West Asheville with her wife and their four dogs and two cats.

Porscha Orndorf:
Porscha grew up in a trailer park in the Plateau (pronounced Plat-aww), North Carolina. You won't find it, or the rest of her story, on any map. She lives in West Asheville with her spouse, two dogs, four cats, and all the birds, squirrels, and flying squirrels who dare to cross her back porch. She enjoys quilting, painting, and reading anything with words. Occasionally, she writes something down. On rare occasions, other people read it.

Ellen Perry:
An English instructor at A-B Tech, Ellen grew up in Weaverville where she continues to live near her family and friends. She loves teaching students from all walks of life; her academic interests include 17th- and 18th-century British life and literature, Restoration drama, and Southern/ Appalachian culture. Ellen enjoys dancing and traveling with her partner, Brad Qualls, as well as playing with their stylish cat, Ms. Coco Chanel.

Makenzie Peterson:
Makenzie Peterson has four moms. She likes witches, plants, poetry, and being published. She will like you if you feed her.

Mark Damon Puckett:
Mark Damon Puckett (markdamonpuckett.com) teaches writing at A-B Tech and is author of The Reclusives, YOU with The Ill-usives and The Killer Detective Novelist. He is book reviewer for the national magazine Act Two, with other work in The Paris-American, Gulf Coast, The Crescent Review, The Tusculum Review and USA Today. Having studied with poets Richard Howard, Simon Ortiz and Adam Zagajewski, he's finishing his M.Litt. in Poetry (his fourth master's) from Middlebury College. His poem, "Music Teacher," is dedicated to the Barden family.

Ethan Risinger:
I get it, You've bit off more than you can chew on ikeahackerz.net and you've felt the reigns of your consciousness be loose. You feel the poke of shelf corners in the night when you wake up surrounded in collections of plywood and screws in plastic baggies. There is a translucent lunchbox of tools on top of your hands and two day old Swedish meatballs on your face that continue to trek en masse down your pre-assembled trampoline cheeks. You've found yourself! And your developing rosacea! In your home! In the deep web of Ikea! Now you're home! Live your life through a thousand Vittsjö computer workstations!

Kadie Sanders:
After her memorable experience at AB Tech, Kadie Sanders has become a Western Carolina University student. She has decided to diversify her creativity by pursuing dance and acting classes along with visual arts. She envisions using many forms of expression to work with people in the Arts in Medicine field. She desires to take creativity into hospitals and nursing homes.

Chris Smith:
Chris has been published in UK and American journals, including Tindal Street Press' Roads Ahead (ed. Catherine O'Flynn), The Manchester Review, Mid-American Review, and Nashville Review. He was a finalist in Glimmer Train's Short Story Award for New Writers, short-listed for The Scott Prize, and nominated for a Push-cart Prize 2012.

Micala Smith:
Dear Booma, Whoever spilled this furry concoction better know to have cleaned it up before I really let them in on what's gonna be the consequences. I'm sure I saw that jar brimming with that juice, it must have done overfilled to ruin mama's crushed cream carpet - her most prized of floor coverings. I would definitely frown at this putrid broth had I been unaware of you and your distaste for sweet smelling rugs and their likened kin.

Zach Walters:
Zach Walters is 24 years of age and currently occupies a body near you. His love of writing started at an early age (2nd Grade) and is matched only by his love of recording music. In his free time, Zach enjoys pessimism.

Liz Williams:
I am so honored to have my work featured in The Rhapsodist. I have loved making art since I was a child and started to hone in on it as a career in 2009. I focus mainly on pop art through digital illustrations, photo manipulations, and apparel design. To see more of my work please visit www.makemesomeart.org.

Magnolia Wilson:
Magnolia is a lot like you.

ENG 125: Creative Writing
Interested in learning the craft of poetry, prose, and dramatic dialogue?
Enroll in A-B Tech's Creative Writing course.

The Rhapsodist will begin accepting submissions for our next issue in September 2015.

Send all queries to rhapsodistjournal@gmail.com

Check out our *Facebook* page for details (The Rhapsodist Literary Arts Journal).

AB Tech Community College

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